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SUBJECT: EGIS CHIEF "NOT OPTIMISTIC" ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR
PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION

Classified by Ambassador Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: In a November 5 meeting, EGIS Chief Omar Soliman told Ambassador that he was "not optimistic" about prospects for Palestinian reconciliation, due to continuing differences between Hamas and Fatah and the difficulty in maintaining the continuing "calm" between minimalist Hamas and Israel. He does expect the Palestinian factions to sign on to a declaration of principles on November 10 but is less sanguine about the prospects for agreement on details of implementation. He is also not optimistic about Cpl Shalit's release absent movement from the Israeli government about the release of Palestinian prisoners. Soliman also said that Egyptian President Mubarak hopes to visit Washington in the spring, and promised to push visiting Iraqi Minister of State for National Security Sharwan Wa'ili to reach an agreement on the SOFA with the U.S. END SUMMARY.

12. (S/NF) Ambassador Scobey called on EGIS Chief Omar Soliman on November 5, accompanied by ORA chief and econ counselor (notetaker). Soliman congratulated the Ambassador on the election, and hoped President-elect Barack Obama would "consider Egypt an ally and friend." He indicated Egyptian President Mubarak would like to visit Washington, DC early in the new Administration "to make a strong case for good relations" between Egypt and the United States.

13. (S) The Ambassador asked about next steps in the Palestinian reconciliation process. Soliman explained his main concerns about prospects for reconciliation, the need to maintain the "calm" between Israel and Hamas, and the differences between Abu Mazen and Hamas.

14. (S) Soliman reported an Israeli incursion into Gaza about 8:30 p.m. local time on November 4. He said the Israelis discovered the Gazans digging a tunnel near the Kerem Shalom border point and decided to destroy it and a house at the end of the tunnel. When they entered the house, they found several Palestinians. The Israelis shot and killed six. There were also some women and children, some of whom were injured. The Israeli troops took the injured women back to Israeli with them to Israeli for medical treatment. He said Amos Gilad assured him the Israelis had not kidnapped the women, and that they would be returned to Gaza on November 5. The Palestinians, Soliman reported, were "shocked" by the Israeli incursion and launched some rockets. Soliman said the Israelis would not respond, as long as the Palestinians did not fire any more rockets.

PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION

15. (S) Soliman said there are many differences between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas. Hamas, he said, is "ruling the strip, and has demolished the PA in Gaza. They are not suffering, they are not under Israeli threat, they have all the materials and goods, and all is quiet." Under these circumstances, Hamas does not see why they should concede anything. In Soliman's view, however, they have no

legitimacy, in the Gaza strip "people hate them" because of the sanctions, and the lack of jobs. They are "suffering" from the lack of recognition, inability to travel and "not being received" by the international community. There is also an impact on Hamas supporters in the West Bank. Soliman pointed out that they cannot participate in society, and are under considerable pressure from the PA, subject to arrest, unable to work, and with their associations and institutions closed. Hamas is unhappy with Egypt, he said, because "they do not feel that we receive them well." They are restricted to EGIS headquarters and the border, and they cannot go anywhere else in Egypt. So, Soliman believes, Hamas will eventually agree to reconciliation to give them legitimacy and to allow their people to participate in West Bank life.

16. (S) Soliman outlined the principles underlying the proposed reconciliation as follows:

- that the Palestinians will form a new, independent government committed to the Quartet principles;
- that a new, independent national Gaza security force, not composed of the factions, will be created, with Egypt responsible for recruiting its officers;
- that there will be new elections for president of the Palestinian Authority and a legislative council when the conditions are "good;" and
- that the "calm" should continue.

Without the calm, he said, there is no deal. Soliman reported that all the factions have agreed to these conditions and will sign a declaration of principles on November 10.

17. (S) Originally, the EGIS chief said, his paper outlining the principles contained considerable detail, but those were widely criticized, and Hamas had refused to attend the November 10 meeting unless it was changed. To obtain agreement for a November 10 signature, Soliman stripped the principles of the details. This, he said, made PA President Abbas unhappy but was the only way forward. In Soliman's judgment, given the level of disagreement, to include the details at the November 10 meeting would cause considerable disagreement and likely allow the media to describe the meetings as a "big failure." Instead, a meeting at which all the factions sign off on the four principles is much more likely to be successful, and seen as "good news."

18. (S) Now, he said, the plan is to have three-four days of meetings starting November 23, at which time the factions will begin to discuss implementation of the four main principles. Discussions will take place within a framework of six committees to discuss:

- an end to the separation between Gaza and the West Bank;
- formation of a new government;
- new elections;
- reform of the security services, including creation of a national service; and
- reactivation of the PLO.

19. (S) The sixth committee, to be headed Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, the head of the Arab League committee for the Palestinians, will monitor and facilitate the work of the other committees. Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa will also be involved in appointing heads of the other five committees. Soliman believes some of the committees will succeed in reaching agreement, and hopes that differences can be isolated to one or two committees.

110. (S) Egypt has also invited Syria, Jordan and the Arab League. He does not know who will attend at this point. Hamas will be represented by Khalid Mishal, while Nabil Shaath will represent Fatah. Abbas will give a speech, and Mishal wanted to as well, but Soliman has said no, on the grounds that Abbas will be representing the entire PA, while Mishal is only representing one of the factions.

111. (S) Soliman is, however "not optimistic" about prospects for success. Hamas does not want to lose power in Gaza, and

so it will create many difficulties. The Israelis are not very supportive, as they do not want to see Hamas gain any legitimacy. Also, he said, the situation in Gaza will not change very quickly, because Hamas will either continue to have a say "or they will come back." The Ambassador asked how Syria would react. Soliman agreed Syria had said four years ago that they would not allow a deal between Israelis and the Palestinians before Syria had its own deal with Israel. He added that Iran has told Hamas "we are paying you \$50 million a month. If you participate in the government we will continue to pay you. If you do not participate in the government, it means that you have given in to the PA and we will end the payments." For these reasons, Soliman said, he is not optimistic but added "we have to try." If the plan fails, he said "we will blame Hamas. The Palestinian people have to feel that choosing Hamas was a bad choice. Then, if we have elections, next year, we hope, Hamas will lose."

NEW GAZA SECURITY FORCE

¶12. (S) The EGIS chief explained that Egypt would be very careful in strengthening the security forces, that the forces will be "very close to us," and will "have no access to Hamas." If this works, he said, Egypt will re-open Rafah. The Palestinians would support this, if it keeps the border open, and would be angered by any Hamas action that would risk the closure of the border, or the reintroduction of Hamas.

RELEASE OF CORPORAL SHALIT

¶13. (S) Soliman said the release of Israeli soldier Cpl Shalit depended on the Israeli government making a decision about potential release of Palestinian prisoners. He said that Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak had told him he was working on this, but that the Israeli government was not ready. Soliman was not optimistic about chances for Shalit's release without a strong Israeli offer on Palestinian prisoners.

¶14. (S) The Ambassador underlined that the President and Secretary Rice want to keep working on the peace process issues, and that even if they are not resolved before the end of the Bush Administration, they want to make as much progress as possible, with the parties fully engaged, and a sense of urgency about the talks. Soliman agreed that this would be very positive, and said that he hoped the new Obama

Administration would have "a platform to launch" from. He observed that Secretary Rice has done a lot of work on this

and that "it will not take much work to get a deal," depending on the new Israeli government.

IRAQI SOFA

¶15. (S) Soliman said that Iraqi Minister of State for National Security Sharwan Wa'ili is visiting, and the Ambassador urged Soliman to encourage Iraq to conclude the SOFA, making clear that Egypt would support their decision. Soliman said that Egypt has told the Iraqis that they need the U.S., and that the agreement will not "be for all time" but that Iraq needs it until they are ready to take on the security on their own. He responded that he did "not understand what they are thinking" and promised to push Wa'ili to make a decision.

SCOBAY